

The Director  
Central Intelligence Agency

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Honorable Birch Bayh, Chairman  
Select Committee on Intelligence  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I much appreciate your thoughtful letter of August 18 regarding the 7 June 1978 Presidential Finding on Covert Action. I agree with your perception that the procedures we are developing for oversight of covert action will lead to a system "characterized by rational decision and proper policy control." I do not believe we could have achieved this progress without the diligence and goodwill of your Committee and its staff.

I share your concern that sensitive activities be approved at appropriate levels of the Executive Branch, so that those who have to bear the consequences of a possible "flap" are permitted to evaluate possible risks in advance. On the other hand, I think some of your proposals tend toward escalating the evaluation of routine covert action activities to an unnecessarily high level. Generally speaking, we consider

to be low-risk activities. Therefore, our procedures for validating such activities do not involve elaborate external review.

I believe that one of the principal reasons we have had a degree of difficulty in reaching a full, common understanding on such matters is the complicated nature of covert action review and approval procedures. These procedures have accumulated over the last few years in response to widespread concern that CIA's covert action programs were not subject to sufficient scrutiny both within the Executive Branch and by Congress. I am confident that the system we have now is fully adequate to ensure proper control and review. At the same time, I believe there is one small, but very significant, change that we can make which will help to clarify the situation. Henceforth, we will categorize findings as either "specific" or "general."

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